



Unwanted Medicines

ENVIRONMENTAL FACT SHEET

Office of Pollution Prevention &
Technical Assistance (OPPTA)

What's the issue?

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) assists communities in preventing pollution and protecting Hoosiers and our environment. IDEM understands the public's concern about pharmaceuticals in the environment and has made considerable efforts to educate local communities and fund local collections. IDEM will continue working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate information about potential environmental impacts and take whatever action is deemed appropriate.

Why is the proper disposal of medicine important?

- Keeping prescription and over-the-counter medicines out of the environment is an important way to prevent pollution;
- Because wastewater facilities aren't designed to remove pharmaceutical chemicals, they could be discharged to streams and lakes in treated wastewater. Researchers are working to determine whether pharmaceuticals in streams or lakes could be affecting fish and other aquatic life. Studies show reproductive and developmental problems in fish and other aquatic wildlife living downstream from some wastewater treatment facilities;
- Pets and children can be poisoned from accidental ingestion of unwanted medicines carelessly thrown away in the trash; and,
- Proper disposal prevents illegal use or theft, including identity theft from discarded containers with patient information.

What should you do with unwanted medicines?

- Never pour medicines down the drain or toilet! This helps to keep pharmaceutical chemicals out of Indiana's streams and lakes;
- Ask your doctor and pharmacist if they'll accept your unwanted or expired medicines;
- Take unwanted medicines to take-back or special collections in your community (*unwanted medicine collections are often provided by local household hazardous waste collection programs, see other side for more information*); and,
- Never give or sell unwanted or expired medicines to family or friends.



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What if collections aren't available in your community?

If you must throw away unwanted or expired medicines, follow these instructions to protect your family and the environment:

- Dissolve tablets or capsules in the original container with a small amount of water. For liquid medications, add sawdust, kitty litter or flour to the original container;
- Remove labels from prescription bottles or completely mark out all patient information;
- Put all lids back on the containers tightly and put them in a heavy-duty sealed bag. Tight lids and sealed bags will keep medications from leaking; and,
- Put the sealed bag in your trash so that it is not visible to prevent unintended use or contact.

How can you help reduce unwanted medicines?

- Purchase only as much medicine as you need;
- Centralize all medications in one location in your home. This may help to limit over-purchasing of products you already have; and,
- Say "no" to samples that you won't use.

For more information:

For information about household hazardous waste collection programs in Indiana, contact IDEM's Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance, toll free, at 1-800-988-7901, directly at (317) 233-8172, or visit <http://www.in.gov/recycle/2844.htm>.

For information about possible environmental impacts from pharmaceutical chemicals, visit U.S. EPA's Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/ppcp>

For information about government research on the presence of pharmaceuticals in the environment, visit the U.S. Geological Survey's Web site at <http://toxics.usgs.gov/regional/emc>.